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# OMAN A Class Analysis

*Solidarity*





## Contents

# Oman: A Class Analysis

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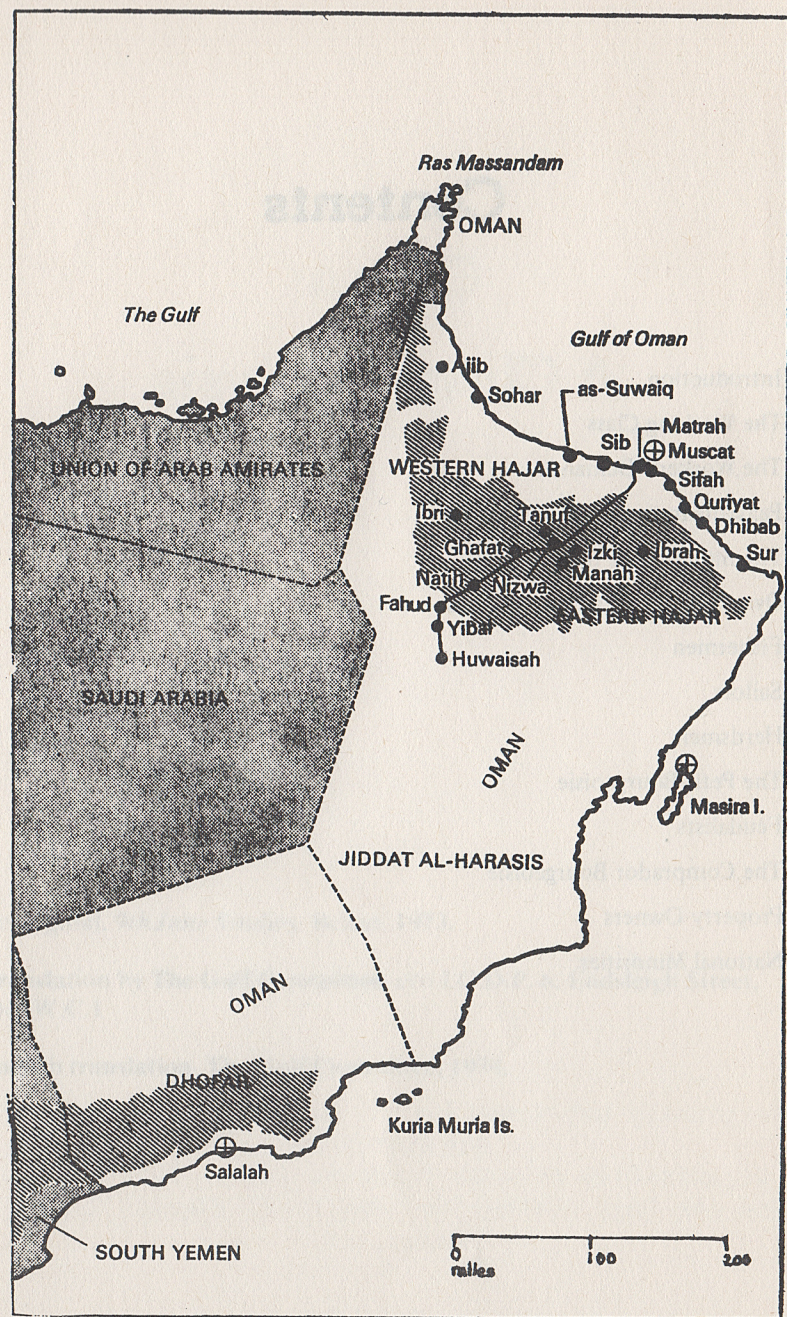
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The "Sultanate" of Oman

## Oman: A Class Analysis

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries British imperialism has tried to destroy the Omani economy and reduce it to a state of chronic stagnation. After they had effectively crippled Omani trade and shipping, they harrassed the peasantry, forcing many of them to emigrate to other parts of the Gulf. At the same time, thousands of fishermen lived in a state of extreme backwardness, dependent on what nature, i.e. the sea, might provide.

On several occasions the Omani people rebelled against British imperialism and its plans for keeping the people in a state of under-development. The revolution which began on 9 June 1965 presented a serious threat to the strategy built on such plans. The British found themselves obliged to introduce an 'open door' policy towards foreign capital, thereby transforming Oman into a large consumer market, and opening the country's natural wealth to exploitation. After 1970, this programme of reforms gave rise to considerable changes in the society, but there can be no doubt about the class character of a society in which the regime has tried to delude the popular classes into believing that it represents them and serves their interests — that they only have to listen and obey. The new class forces are fully aware of the contradictions opposing them to the imperialist and feudal authorities, and to the agents of monopoly companies in Oman. No propaganda can remove these contradictions which are developing all the time.

Thus we see that it is most important to understand the class situation in our country and the class forces in our nation, and also to develop our knowledge of the enemies of the revolution. We are well aware of the difficulties inherent in such an analysis because of the lack of studies on the area, or accurate demographic statistics. The puppet government of Sultan Qabus considers such facts to be secrets which should not be revealed, since to do so would discredit the promises given to the people.

### The Working Class

The first groups of Omani workers appeared with the arrival of the oil companies in the 1950s (Petroleum Development [Oman] Ltd., City Services Ltd). These companies depended for labour on the tribes from the areas around the oil-fields. In the case of PDO, the majority of its workers were from the tribes of Duru and Janab; the government, in conjunction with the company, gave the contract for providing labour to the chiefs of



these tribes. In effect, this provided these leaders with considerable power over the workers, which the companies could exploit to prevent strikes. The petroleum and construction companies used Omani workers for unskilled labour and restricted skilled work to foreigners, Europeans or Indians. This increasingly aroused opposition amongst Omani workers. The companies also wanted to reduce the size of the labour force by introducing modern technological methods for drilling, extraction, and other oil-producing operations. This reduced the opportunities for Omani workers to learn skills and the companies were thereby able to justify their increasing reliance on foreign, skilled, workers; at the same time they were of course making larger and larger excess profits.

Since Sultan Qabus came to power in 1970 the number of workers has increased rapidly, because of his policy of welcoming foreign capital and companies, and giving more and more favourable concessions to foreign oil companies. Most of the workers come from the following sources:

(1.) Omani workers who have left the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and the "Trucial States", to return to the Sultanate after Said bin Taimur was deposed. These workers are both skilled and semi-skilled (building workers, mechanics, technical assistants, etc.). They originate mostly from the Omani hinterland and the East coast. This has resulted in a community of very mixed tribal origins, and especially in the new workers' residential area at Ruwi, outside Muscat.

(2.) Workers who have left their previous occupations (in farming, fishing, or herding) and have come to Muscat from the Omani hinterland or from Dhofar. One point should be stressed about the influx of workers from the countryside to the town (the capital and its suburbs): the workers have heard of the colonialists' promises to the people, but finding no trace of them in the countryside, peasants, fishermen and shepherds have rushed to the town to seek those promised jobs. This factor has created increasing problems of overcrowding and further created an unemployed labour force charged with national consciousness. The interaction of these two groups expressed itself in the workers' uprising of September 1971.

(3.) Foreign workers — Indians, Ugandan Asians, Pakistanis, Iranians, and others — attracted by Government propaganda and from labour-supply companies. Many of them have come to Oman to work in construction work or to do contract work on roads and buildings. This group constitutes a serious competitive threat to Omani workers. During the reign of Said bin Taimur, companies used to import these workers and pay them higher wages than the Omani workers, thereby ensuring their loyalty. But these workers are now taking strike action, receiving low wages, and suffering bad conditions. Statistics issued by the authorities in 1971 estimate the number of workers employed by the government or with companies as follows:

<i>Omanis:</i>	
Civil servants, supervisors, technicians	330
Skilled workers (electrical engineers, carpenters etc)	915
Semi-skilled (e.g. electricians' mates)	1266
Non-skilled (servants, labourers)	7148

Total	9659
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<i>Foreign Workers:</i>	
Civil servants, supervisors, technicians	1163
Skilled workers	1035
Semi-skilled	440

Total	2368
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Workers are concentrated in companies and institutions as follows:

<i>PDO and subsidiaries</i>	
Omani workers	3020
Foreign workers	832

Total	3852
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<i>Shell garages, Cable and Wireless, commerce, hotel trade:</i>	
Omani workers	1020
Foreign workers	690

Total	1710
-------	------

<i>Contract companies:</i>	
Omani workers	5519
Foreign workers	3147

Total	8666
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Government apparatus (except Army and police)	2807
Omanis	

Servants, taxi-drivers, small shopkeepers estimated at 3,500

The total number of Omani workers is thus 15,023.

The number of workers in industry is 9% of the total labour force, distributed amongst PDO, the contract companies, building contractors and foreign institutions operating in Oman.



Wages (in Sa'idi Riyals)	Monthly	from	to
unskilled		22	36
semi-skilled		29	50
skilled		38	86
staff, supervisors		80	162

#### Government:

1: Doctors, Engineers	150	305
2: Doctors' assistants, Deputy managers	90	190
3: Office staff, secretaries	40	100
4: i, ii, Crane drivers, radio employees	25	52.5
4: iii, iv, Meter readers and v, vi "houseboys", cleaners	15	20

The main areas of working class concentration are as follows.

- (1) Employed and unemployed workers are concentrated in the area Azaiba-Watiyya-Ruwi where a workers' settlement of 12,000 inhabitants has grown up.
- (2) Groups of workers have appeared in places with special projects such as Raysut, Sur, and Banha in addition to Muscat and Mattrah, where the government is extending the ports.
- (3) Workers in the oil company are concentrated at Al Nahud and Jabiil.
- (4) A number of peasants join building contractors for limited, seasonal, periods when they work on buildings and roads.
- (5) Workers are also found in the British military bases — at Masirah, Salalah, Beit al-Falaj and elsewhere.

#### The workers' demands

What frightens the colonialist government most is the enormous concentration of workers around Ruwi. Every movement among these workers, however small, reminds them of the glorious days of the workers' uprising in September 1971. This large concentration of workers has led some of the British researchers who have come to Oman to study the economic situation, to point to the danger of such a formation, and the need for extreme caution. It could become a centre for violence and a base for the revolutionary movement, they argue. Many workers are unemployed and live for months in the Ruwi area seeking work, while the contractors and foreign companies import foreign workers to guarantee production without 'problems'. They gain large profits through buying the labour power of these workers. The workers in Fahud and Sih al Malih have continually expressed deep discontent with their deprived living conditions. These workers and others have frequently raised demands, which covered the following ground:

- (1) Increased wages — a solution to the problem of vicious exploitation and unreasonable rises in the cost of living — parity with foreigners with regard to concessions.
- (2) Housing.

(3) Training for skilled work.

(4) Solutions to problems of communications and hard working conditions.

(5) Insurance — holidays — rights — promotion.

(6) Trade Union rights: the right to form workers' associations — workers' committees, trade unions, workers' health funds.

(7) Democratic rights: General liberties — an end to police and intelligence service terrorisation — a labour law protecting the interests of workers — an end to the labour overlords' unrestricted manipulation of the workforce.

(8) National rights: the oppression suffered by workers is closely related to national oppression. The oil companies, foreign companies and contractors rob the workers and exploit them beyond the limit, as is characteristic of neo-colonialism and its institutions. The workers realise that if they throw off the yoke of colonialism from the country this would also go a long way towards solving the problem of class oppression which they suffer. Naturally this will be so, provided the foreign military presence and bases are also removed from our soil.

#### Peasants in the Jabal Akhdar

In the 1950s the oppressive colonial policy, characterised by a lack of encouragement to agriculture, and unequal competition with foreign producers, destroyed the livelihood of many peasants. Similarly the discovery of oil resources in the Amirates persuaded peasants to leave the land and there was also migration to the East African coast. The present reactionary policy, with its lack of interest in agriculture, is still an incentive to the peasantry to seek work in other fields. The situation varies from area to area, especially between the East-Jaalaan which is quite cultivated and other parts of Oman. Much of the hinterland is cultivable and yet it suffers from almost total neglect on the part of the state: this is true for regions such as Jiddat al Harasis, al Jaazir, and the west of the Jabal Akhdar (Rub al Khali) — regions where there have been no attempts at exploration for water or general development.

According to official statistics the estimated area of cultivable land is as follows:

Al Batinah	14,556 Hectares
Al Buraimi	567 Hectares
Al Zahirah	3,636 Hectares
Al Hajar (west)	33,842 Hectares
Al Hajar (east)	3,442 Hectares
Central Oman	9,946 Hectares
Al Sharqiyya & Jaalaan	2,831 Hectares
Cape Massandam	400 Hectares
Dhofar	800 Hectares
TOTAL	37,020 Hectares



The total area of Oman is approximately 300,000 sq. km. and 65% of the inhabitants practise agriculture. Despite the comparatively small proportion of cultivable land available, agriculture provides basic subsistence for 65% of the population: in addition the fishermen from the Batinah, Sur, and Cape Massadam also supplement their subsistence from agriculture.

### **The Situation of the Peasantry**

Because of the tribal structure of the society, the peasants worked the lands belonging to their tribes, since most land was under collective (i.e. tribal) ownership. In Said bin Taimur's time some land on the Batinah coast and the plain of Salalah was also owned by feudal landowners. The majority of the peasants could not prove their hereditary right to ownership of land. In regions which are cultivated seasonally — like Dhofar in the rainy season — there was no private ownership of land. Before the revolution of 1965 it was the right of every herdsman to cultivate whatever area he could during the rainy season, within the area belonging to his tribe. Since the revolution they can cultivate whatever land they like, since the revolution has put an end to tribal ownership and declared that the land belongs to the people.

When Qabus took power, he issued an order confiscating the peasants' land, demanding that they present documentary evidence of ownership. Many peasants thereby lost their land, while tribal sheikhs were able to grab most of the cultivable land. These sheikhs also used their tribal power to dispossess small peasants of their land. During their land-confiscation operations the regime, following the desires of the feudalists, also gave small land holdings to some poor peasants, in return for a sizeable sum repayable over a number of years. This ensured that the feudalists and the regime could dominate the peasants, and of course seize their lands when the poverty-stricken peasantry found the repayments impossible. Because of this tyrannical law and the distribution of the best agricultural land to foreign companies for exploitation, the number of destitute agricultural labourers and peasants increased greatly.

The situation differs from region to region. *In the Eastern region*, most of the peasants emigrated, thus creating a shortage of manpower in agriculture. As a result the peasants were able to bargain over selling their labour power, and force the landowners to pay wages. The peasants have gained the right to a share of the yield (1/5) or a cash wage, to grow whatever crops and vegetables they like, and to market them without interference from the landlord. Where the yield was small, the peasant would work part-time on his plot or leave it entirely and work for someone else. The yearly income fluctuates between 120-150 riyals. The peasants in the mountains face different conditions from those prevailing in the east.

Here the peasants did not emigrate from the mountains in large numbers so the landlord could easily acquire labour and thus can control it.

*Peasants in al Batinah and the Central Region:* Under Said bin Taimur, peasants in some parts of the Central region were prevented from returning to their home areas. They were also banned from work in the army or in companies, and were therefore forced to continue in agriculture. They can be divided into three categories.

#### **(1) Poor Peasants:**

- a) Share-croppers who get 1/5 of the grain harvest. The peasant has to irrigate and prepare the ground and pay half the cost of manure. In areas where date palms are the main crop, he has the right to one bunch of dates if the palm produced more than two. If the field is two or less, the peasant gets none. If the harvest fails to be sold, or is ruined by pest, he gets no compensation from the landowner. In the sowing season, some owners help their share-cropping peasants by hiring some additional labour. Peasants in this category do not depend on agriculture alone, but also engage in wood-gathering, collection of honey, and various other jobs.
- b) Some peasants work their own small holdings, and are forced into wage labour on others' lands for subsistence, since their own holdings do not supply their needs.
- c) Agricultural labourers, centred in al Batinah. They work for a landowner at fixed wages.
- d) 'Slaves' work on the land especially in al Batinah — deprived of the most basic human rights.

(2) *Middle Peasants:* they possess a piece of cultivable land which they work themselves, together with some hired labour. These peasants are found in many areas.

(3) *Rich peasants.* These are, for example, tribal sheikhs in al-Batinah and around the Jabal Akhdar. They possess large land holdings, and make use of machinery, ploughs and threshing machines (all such machinery is owned by the state and hired out at 1 riyal per hour). Labourers or share-croppers work on their lands. In a disastrous season, peasants and share croppers lose heavily for the reasons given above, so most prefer wage labour.

### **Ownership of Agricultural Land**

#### **(1) State ownership in its various forms:**

- a) Treasury lands where the income returns to the state: peasants work the lands as share-croppers or wage-labourers. At harvest time, state inspectors are present to assess the value of the harvest and take possession of it.
- b) Model state farms around Nizwa and Sohar worked by labourers: the revenue goes to the state.



c) *Waqf* (religious endowments): the right to dispense the profits of a 'waqf' is in the hands of the local governor, who appoints a deputy to administer these lands. They are usually worked by share-croppers.

(2) *Capitalist Investment*: After Qabus came to power, foreign companies rushed to get their hands on agricultural land and exploit it to their own advantage. Many of these companies are American. Food Machinery Corporation, a large American monopoly company operating in the third world contracted a \$6M deal to carry out an agricultural development programme, including palms, livestock, citrus trees and vegetables; it surveyed the market, labour and management potential, as well as setting up two date processing factories, in Nizwa and Rustaq. It also contracted to set up two model farms in Salalah and al Batinah and a model farm for citrus fruits coupled with a canning plant. This is in addition to British companies who have cultivated bananas, sugar and fruits in the Batinah and the hinterland.

(3) *Large holdings*: these are held by feudal landowners from the Al Bu Said family and other tribal sheikhs. They are found in most cultivable areas, and especially in al Batinah. Foreigners and merchants have also acquired huge estates in presents from the Sultan. They employ hired labour.

(4) *Medium holdings*: the landowner works the holding himself with a small number of hired hands who work seasonally, especially in the date season. They are found mostly in Jaalaan and the Jabal Akhdar.

(5) *Small holdings*: these holdings are found in the plain of Salalah, in the Batinah, and in most cultivable areas, especially after Qabus's decree concerning agricultural property, which gave the right of ownership to Omanis. The peasants suffer from the following problems:

- a) Total state neglect for their living conditions, health and education.
- b) Vicious state exploitation. The state takes advantage of its monopoly of pesticides and agricultural machinery, giving preference to rich peasants and feudal landlords.
- c) Complete state neglect of marketing problems, with the result that the peasants often lose their crops, especially citrus fruit. Merchants, largely from Muscat, also control the marketing of dates.
- d) Villages are isolated, making communications difficult, and heavy costs are thus involved in selling crops.
- e) Widespread failure of crops and other losses borne by peasants with no compensation.
- f) There is no co-operative society to look after the interests of the poor peasant in the purchase of seed, fertilizer, agricultural supplies, and in marketing of produce.
- g) The ignorance of the peasants, who use primitive ploughing methods, leads to low yields.
- h) The accumulation of debts forces the peasants to borrow money.

They then have to sell their crops to the money-lender at low prices. Should the peasant fail to repay his debts, cruel sanctions are imposed. (if he has a daughter, he will have to give her in marriage to the creditor, or his lands may be confiscated in settlement of the debt).

There is no doubt that the general oppression suffered by the peasantry, and especially poverty, is caused by the tyranny practised by the British and the Al Bu Said regime against the people. The ruling circles control farming equipment, seeds, manure, pesticides and so on, making huge profits at the expense of the people since the poor peasants have no access to these circles, their work is hampered, whereas rich peasants and feudal landowners can get what they need by bribing officials. The contradictions between the rich and poor peasants are concealed by tribal relations and traditions. And these tribal structures make the poor peasant see not the feudal landowners and the rich peasants as their enemies, but the Al Bu Said family and the English, against whom they direct all their hatred.

### Fishermen

The Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea is one of the richest fishing areas in the world. International fishing companies operate there, stealing the fish from our people and co-operating with the reactionary regime to get concessions. Most coastal inhabitants of the area from Dhofar to Cape Massandam are fishermen, though some also do seasonal agricultural work. There are an estimated 25,000 fishermen, who may be categorised as follows:

- (1) *Destitute fishermen*: they are the majority and use a 'Huri' (a small boat). The Huri is owned by one or two men who fish from morning to night. They cannot fish in the open sea, but are restricted to fishing close to the shore. Many of these deprived fishermen and especially those coming from the area between Sur and Jazir, also use the 'Qurb' — a small boat suitable only for use near the shore. They earn small returns in exchange for a lot of effort and exposure to the dangers of the sea and to sharks.
- (2) *Middle Fishermen*: A number of fisherman will own a launch in which they can go out to sea, catch bigger fish and sell them.
- (3) *Rich fishermen*: They own launches in which they work with other fishermen. They get large catches which they sell to merchants or the big fishing companies.

There are contradictions between these three groups, since the last two have begun to force the poorer fishermen to operate closer and closer to land. They drop their nets close to the coast, then trawl out to sea, thus netting both the coastal and the deep sea catch. There is no doubt that the poor fishermen are amongst the most oppressed elements in the



community and that their problems must be dealt with. These men face the dangers of the sea, without any security. The state shows no concern for their situation — they are a forgotten group in our society. It is worth noting that the reactionary regime set aside very little in the 1971 budget for the improvement of fishing resources! Only if these men unite can they save their situation and improve their working conditions, gain access to the equipment they require, and improve their standards of health and education. And since the class oppression they face is caused by the presence of colonialism and the Al Bu Said regime, nothing can save them except joining the revolution.

### Sailors

British colonialism played an important role in smashing Omani shipping and Omani maritime trade, when it destroyed the Omani merchant navy in the nineteenth century to replace it with British and Indian companies (Gray MacKenzie Company, I.B.I.) It also increased the influence of Indian merchants in Muscat. The position of crews and shipping merchants declined greatly with the intervention of international shipping companies, since transport on the decks of wooden ships became less profitable. Later, as a result of the harsh conditions sailors suffered at the hands of merchants and captains throughout the season, and in addition of the natural dangers of the sea, the number of sailors dwindled, and consequently there was a demand for the labour force once again. Nevertheless their wages are very low and are in no way commensurate with the rise in the cost of living. Sailors suffer from lack of safety equipment at sea, inadequate communications with the land, and lack of equipment in case of sinking. They are neglected by the reactionary regime; the latter is afraid of them because they support the revolution and they help to transport fighters and weapons. The regime therefore puts pressure on them. The regime's decree in early 1973, banning Omani ships from going to Democratic Yemen, was dictatorial in the extreme, and is a clear case of the harm the regime is doing to the interests of seamen and sea merchants.

Seamen can be divided into the following categories:

- (1) *Wage earners*: They take a fixed wage at the beginning of the season, when the captain lays down conditions. If the sailor leaves the ship before the end of the season, he has to return the entire wage. He thus gets no pay for working a part of a season. Some workers receive a monthly wage. They get low pay and suffer unemployment throughout the rainy season.
- (2) *Skippers*: skippers fall into two groups. One group own their own boats and skipper them. The other group do not own boats, but skipper for an owner.
- (3) *Merchants*: these also fall into two categories. Some own one boat

which they work with. Others own several boats. These are the most reactionary of the sea traders.

It is necessary to pay special attention to the down-trodden seamen, and to support their demands concerning their general living conditions.

### Herdsmen

People who live by herding are found in Jiddat al Harasis, al Jazir, the mountains of Jaalaan, Dhofar, al Duru and on the slopes and to the west of the Jabal Akhdar. There are two groups — settlers and nomads. The settlers live in mountains, while the nomads are constantly moving around the slopes. Their standard of living is low. Their staple diet is coffee, dates and milk, with occasional rice; their wealth is sheep, goats and camels.

(1) *The Nomads*: they live on the slopes, using trees for shelter. Their movements are totally dependent on their camels and goats. They are mainly found in the al Fahud and Harasis areas. They are not interested in ownership of land; such a concept has no meaning for them. Some of them living in al Fahud, Jiddat al Harasis and parts of the Eastern region get occasional work with the companies in those places. The most important groups of these nomads are the Masharifa tribe in Jaalan and the Duru Janabah and Al Wahibah in al Fahud.

(2) *The Settlers*: they live mainly on and around the Jabal Akhdar and the Jabal Kawr. They own between 10 and 300 head of goat. They are distinguished by the high level of co-operation between them, and the fact that the women work alongside the men. There are about 500 of them on the slopes of the Jabal Akhdar. In addition to herding they also hunt, and collect fruit and honey.

The herdsmen suffer from illiteracy and lack of schools, hospitals and roads, in addition to harassment from the army and the resulting theft of animals and disruption of the herds whenever the army approaches their area. The army has traditionally depended on the herdsmen for knowledge of roads and paths, so the young men flee whenever the army approach to avoid showing them the roads. The new reactionary regime has resorted to providing them with weapons, calling them to fight the 'communists' and defend themselves. They were also asked to inform the army whenever any 'communists' come to them; this happened in al Jazir. The regime also pays them bribes, or dominates them by sending British and Jordanian intelligence officers to terrorise and humiliate them. Nevertheless the regime is afraid of them and will not allow them to build hard buildings, for fear that they will use them as armouries!

### The Petit-Bourgeoisie

The petit-bourgeoisie includes a wide range of social groups, both within the peasantry and in the urban population. In this section, we will



concentrate on the urban sections, since we have already discussed the peasantry.

(1) *Craftsmen*: Oman is famous for its artisanal crafts such as sword-making, smelting, textiles, sugar processing — processes carried out by a small number of craftsmen. Colonialism dealt a severe blow to this sector by flooding the market with mass-produced goods. This group lives under difficult conditions, completely ignored by the regime, which shows no interest in preserving the skill of these craftsmen and finding them work.

2) *Small shopkeepers*: this category is a wide social group. It has spread throughout Oman since Qabus promised his reforms and opened the country to capitalist imports. In the wake of these promises, many inhabitants and small capitalists who had emigrated returned to open small shops in their towns and villages. They suffer from domination of trade by the comprador bourgeoisie and from the extortionate prices imposed on them which prevent them from making a profit. In the coastal towns they also suffer as a result of the influx of foreigners that has occurred since Qabus came to power. Small traders in Dhofar also complain of the economic blockade imposed by the reactionary regime on the mountain herdsmen, preventing them from coming to town to sell wood and buy their essential supplies.

(3) *The service sector*: the puppet regime wants to open the door to foreign monopoly capital and so panders to the wishes of foreign capitalists, providing bars, restaurants, hotels — all services for the leisure of the colonialists and traitors. Opening the doors to foreign commodities as a way of consuming oil revenues has resulted in the growth of extensive service sectors in the towns. The service sector suffers from a decline in its economic position. They also suffer the fragmentation imposed by the colonialists on the popular sectors, and so feel a deep hatred towards the colonialists and the traitors. The latter play with millions of riyals and want the people to be their slaves, acting as their servants and bowing the knee before them.

(4) *Civil servants*: the regime uses this sector to extend its apparatus and to attract educated elements to its ranks. The group suffers from domination by foreign administrators (British and Jordanian). Nor does it have the confidence of the regime which is suspicious of it, especially after the regime realised that most of the educated elements returning to Oman helped to spread a nationalist consciousness to workers and played a role in the popular demonstrations at Sur, Rustaq and elsewhere in 1972. All the petit bourgeois elements complain of harassment by the puppet regime and by British and Jordanian intelligence officials. They have a nationalist and revolutionary potential, which they want to use in the service of their country. They are deprived of the most basic democratic and political rights. They complain that their social position is being eroded and that their incomes are being lowered while prices rise. As a result they live in perpetual economic crisis.

(5) *Residual slave relations*: foreign and Omani merchants used to bring Africans to Oman and sell them to feudal sheikhs in the Jaalaan and al Batinah areas, as well as to the ruling family which made them into palace slaves for domestic work and service to the Sultan. The need for slaves also arose from the lack of agricultural labour, as well as the huge profits which the merchants made from the traffic. In Sur the sheikhs and aristocrats used these slaves to work in their sea-launches, to form a crew of slaves. Inland they were used as servants in the palaces serving tea and coffee, and in the Batinah as domestic servants in houses and farming estates.

### Feudalists

The Al Bu Said family (in its ruling branch) and tribal sheikhs form the feudal stratum in Oman and are closely interrelated with the tribal structure. But now they are undergoing changes which are eroding their position and effectively destroying it. These are:

(1) The increasing importance of oil and manufactured goods, which are relegating agriculture to second place.

(2) The destruction of the tribal structure as a result of the new policies, which have deprived tribal sheikhs of their political influence in the central administration, and the fear that the status of the sheikhs will change. However there are a number of sheikhs who are exploiting the new situation to increase their land holdings and become rich peasants. This is in addition to other activities, such as obtaining land for building, or buying vehicles to market transport, or using their tribal positions to do deals with the regime.

Feudalism as a social system is in decline although Oman still suffers from pre-capitalist relations, characterised by the tribal structure, slavery, and the tribal ownership of land and water, so that some settled herdsmen still fight over water sources. The sheikhs have also been witnessing a decline in their political role as the regime now exercises *direct* control over the people in preference to the previous system of *indirect* control via sheikhs. This process has coincided with the increasing dominance of the Al Bu Said family and their tendency to treat Oman as their own feudal estate.

### The Comprador Bourgeoisie

They are divided into two categories:

(1) Local bourgeois who have developed after Qabus took power; these are either Omani merchants who had gathered in Dubai, or local comprador who never emigrated but were unable to expand.

(2) Foreigners: those of Indian Origin (like Magi Ram Das) form the backbone of this group. The group is closely linked to the ruling family and the colonialists, and has confidential ties with British officers. They



are in full control of internal trade, and manipulate prices, since they dominate currency exchange, the banks and commercial contracts. This class is a basic enemy of the people and the revolution. It stands together with the colonialists and the ruling family; Qabus and his gang share their profits. The class ties this group enjoys with the colonialists have been produced by the integration of Oman into the world capitalist market and the availability of most commodities and consumer goods. Their interests coincide, since the comprador class are the local agents of foreign companies, gaining large profits from their intermediary dealings.

### Property owners

When Qabus's regime came to power and opened Oman to foreign capital, none of the prerequisites for such an influx were available in Muscat. A widespread wave of land purchasing therefore gripped Muscat and its environs, with the building of houses, hotels and shops. Land buying then spread to other areas which were to be developed, like Sur and Raysut. A group of land owners and speculators began to emerge, primarily from among the non-Omani comprador group but also from the ruling family and some of the larger local merchants. This class exploits the people extensively, controlling rents and co-ordinating its interests with those of the Muscat government. The colonial tendency to bring in foreign companies and capital has also created a demand for services and residential facilities: the puppet regime and the foreign banks have not missed out on this golden opportunity. When one company was established to build residential accommodation the British Bank of the Middle East took 37.5% of the shares, the comprador bourgeois took 25% and the Oman government the rest.

### National Minorities

There are several minorities in Oman of Indian and Baluchi origin, who came and settled in the past. But the colonial regime, having divided the land also wants to divide the people of Oman. They diffused the basest forms of propaganda amongst these minorities: — to the Khoja traders they said: 'the Omanis will drive you into the sea. Your only recourse is to throw in your lot with the regime and the colonialists'. They told the Baluchis that they would take them home and liberate Baluchistan for them, therefore they should help the government against the 'communists'. They use influential figures among the minority communities to dominate them, and by deception, conceal the oppression which these minorities suffer, in order that they should be used by the regime, to help put down the uprisings of the Omani people.

But the revolution has taken a firm, revolutionary, stand towards these minorities. It says to them 'Omanis, join hands with one another and liberate your land from British colonialism and the Al Bu Said family,

Iranian occupation and neo-colonialism. Let us together build a society over which the flag of freedom and dignity will fly.'

The revolution opposes the oppression of the people. It says to all those Omanis who believe, as we do, in the freedom and honour of Oman: 'You share with us our rights and our responsibilities. We believe that national minorities should as equals enjoy the right to maintain their traditions, language and culture, as well as the right to preserve and expand their group. The colonialists are the enemies of all people whatever their race or class. The revolution is humanitarian and progressive. It will throw no-one into the sea, nor will it bring disgrace to anyone. It will try to save the whole nation from colonialism and treason. The revolution opposes chauvinism and will fight it and will fight the colonialist policy of setting people against people'. The People's Front calls on these minorities to stand with the revolution to fight for freedom and the independence of Oman.

*The Khojas:* Indian traders of Shiah Islam, the Khoja arrived in Oman over a century and a half ago, and settled in communities in Muscat and Mattrah. From there some of them went to Khabura, Saham, Sohar, the Trucial Coast, Bahrein and Kuwait. Large numbers of them emigrated to Iraq, settling in Baghdad and Basra for economic reasons and for reasons of religious affinity. In Mattrah they built a wall around their community; this was mainly to protect themselves and their religious customs. The Khoja have their own language of Indian origin, which they use when discussing their affairs. But Arabic continues to be the language of religious and popular ritual, literature and poetry. Because of their long-established position, their social situation has not been subjected to rapid change. Intermarrying has been infrequent because of religious doctrine; this still prevails today though it may be a little less strong. The comprador bourgeoisie head the social hierarchy within this minority, and the Khoja community leaders are chosen from amongst them. The Omani regime relies on this comprador stratum in tax collection, legal matters, contracts and so on. They know that they want to own property, both real estate and palm groves in such places as Sib, al Batinah, Swif, Ghala and Khaburah. Next in the social scale come related groups — craftsmen, traders, shopkeepers, and a few teachers, bank clerks, civil servants and students.

The generation of the 1950s was shaken by the growth of Arab nationalism. In 1956 the young men joined a small demonstration which marched around the walls of the Khoja enclave in Mattrah, condemning the British, French and Israeli attack on Egypt. Some also participated in the demonstrations in Dubai in 1967, burning down the offices of foreign companies — the British Bank of the Middle East, Gray Mackenzie, Towell.



The older generation have remained prisoners of fear and the rumour that any change in the regime could result in the destruction of their traditional way of life. Although they know that the regime itself spreads these ideas, they are afraid that with a revolution they would be cruelly treated as a national and religious minority. After the Qabus coup, the Khoja who were in a position to do so, sent their children abroad for education. Some of their sons now work in the civil service, while others participated in the great workers' uprising of September 1971, and were imprisoned as a result. Because of Tariq bin Taimur's attitude towards them, some of them joined his organisation (*the Front to Liberate Oman*) as an expression of their nationalist aspirations; others joined Arab nationalist parties in the 1960s.

**The Baluchis:** they are numerically the largest minority and the most widespread. They are found in Muscat, Mattrah, all over the Batinah coast, especially in Sib, in the hinterland (al Jila), Mazim (al Tahirah) and Sur. They can be subdivided into three groups according to when they arrived in Oman.

- (1) A large group came decades ago and settled in Mazim. They inter-married with Omanis. Some of them settled in Sib, al Batinah, Muscat and Mattrah, and Sur.
- (2) Another group came just before the Jabal Akhdar war (1957-59): they joined the Sultan's army since he promised that he would replace the coastal enclave of Gwadar, which he had sold to Pakistan, with a special area for them in Oman. But disillusionment with the Sultan's promises led them to form a widespread secret organisation within the army. The aim of the organisation was to defend their rights and position against any danger the revolution might pose to them. According to their leaders, they have a direct link with the British and Iranians.
- (3) The third group have come as mercenaries to fight on behalf of the reactionary Sultan. They provide the basic manpower of the army on which the Sultan depends in his struggle against the revolution. They work for contracts of three to five years' duration. Their job — to kill.

As we have said the Baluchis work mostly in the army or the police, and some trade or deal in property, the best known being Muhammad Nasib Musa Abdul Rahman. Many also work as porters or chauffeurs in the ports of Mattrah and Muscat.

The revolution affirms that these people are a part of the Omani people in its aim of expelling the British and the Sultan, and continuing the struggle until the country is liberated and the people are united. Then all will live together under the protection of a national democratic government which would respect and care for all its citizens.



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